

Wishbone Ash

Melody Maker band breakdown.

Words by Roy Hollingworth, pictures by Barrie Wentzell

Where do we go from here?

WISHBONE ASH have climbed their first mountain. It only struck me when I saw them giggling on BBC 2s "Old Grey Whistle Test" last week, blowing away as if they appeared on television twice nightly that they had well and truly arrived. But now people start expecting things.

No only do they start expecting, but they become more astute. "Wishbone have made it, I've heard they are very good. Well, let's see what they can do." The critical eye becomes sharp. They are no longer the band that needs help, no longer one of the hard-working, unrewarding unknowns.

Whether they like it or not they have been put in a position that's as dangerous as walking a wire wearing pit boots. MM readers voted them the most promising band of the year, so a lot of folks are expecting great things from them.

It's come to a point where things could go

wrong. But we'll sit down, and have a long talk about it," says Steve Upton (bass). They are one of the more together variety of bands, both musically, and mentally. They are similar in outlook, similar with humour.

Miles Copeland is their manager. But he doesn't push. Wishbone wouldn't stand for that. The whole concern is built up on a closely knit foundation. "Everyone knows what everyone is doing. We all know where we stand. There are no dark corners in the set-up. It's called communication," says guitarist Ted Turner.

So how did it all start? They didn't arrive overnight — a blessing for all concerned. There's been no hype, no ear-blasting. They went out and played, and it's a warming fact that bands can still succeed on that level.

Around the summer of 1969, Martin Turner and Steve Upton (drums) had a three piece operating with Martin's brother. It broke up, Martin's brother quit, and times looked low. But Steve and Martin decided to stay together. Then they met Miles.

"I don't want to see several months later that they advertised through MM for more musicians." It was a tricky thing to do," recalls

Martin. "We wanted to get a band together, but we didn't want a contrived band. We didn't want something that would fall away after six months."

They auditioned Ted Turner, and among the others, Andy Powell, and lots more. "After a month we didn't feel we'd found the right person to fit into the concept, so we threw the whole thing open again, and re-thought the whole idea, and decided that there would have to be changes. We remembered Ted and Andy, and asked them to call on us again."

Ted and Andy didn't know each other at all. But during one afternoon of playing, and talking, something clicked.

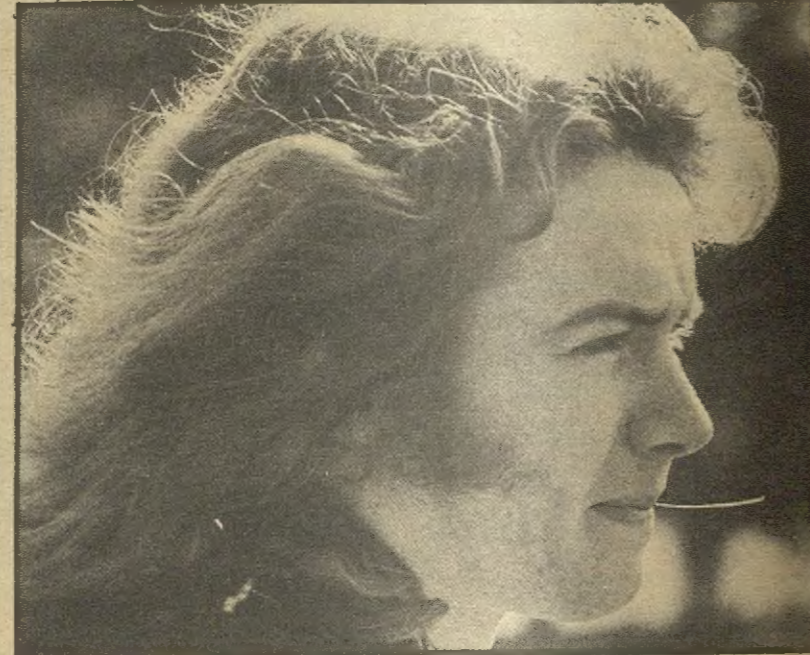
Wishbone are talking about America. "The bands I've seen in the States seem to be lazy with their presentation. I mean remember that one that took 20 minutes to tune up on stage. Christ, I'd like to see a band try that on at the Lyceum. Yeh, I'd just like to see the audience react to that one."

"Every gig," says Steve, "is a unique event." "The stage is there, and that stage is the focus point for the energy potential. You'll get a group who will take energy from the audience, take it in, and feed it back."

You can tell what an audience is like straight away, as soon as you see them. You can pick up the vibes," adds Ted. "I don't feel we are too ambitious in the studio," says Martin. "I reckon, well not just reckon — know — and putting out albums. But not really albums you can get away with what



ANDY POWELL/TED TURNER/STEVE UPTON/MARTIN TURNER.



a studio can do. But you've got to keep your head a little."

Steve spikes the conversation. "You've got to remember, Martin, we're still young, still young to things like studios."

"We're obviously not using the studio to its full potential, and yet in a way, I hope we never will. There are bands using every available knob on the deck — and putting out albums. But not really albums you can get away with what

attempt to do them on stage. "You can really overdo it. We use two guitars, bass and drums. We once used a pianist. There's countless things we could be tempted to use — but we're firm believers in the fact that there's still a lot to do with a guitar line-up."

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reason at all why material can't be produced that's suitable for a loud rock band, and make it sound like music. You can be loud, very loud — but you can also be melodic."

How much advice should a band take? How open were Wishbone to outside influences, who did they take notice of?

"Martin mulls things over. "We don't accept the crap. We don't accept the rubbish people tend to push at you. It wouldn't work. It's rarely

that we will take advice musically, and it's got to be from someone who we really think has something relevant, something solid."

"If Miles (Copeland) oversteps the mark, then we'll tell him. We'll let him know."

"Things overlap," says Steve. "You've got to have overlapping, you've got to have this internal relationship. We play the music, Miles does the business, that's his job, the other is ours."

Andy Powell Ted Turner

EVERY now and then a partnership appears that just somehow seems natural. Guitarists Ted Turner and Andy Powell are as perfect a foil for each other in playing technique that's available on view in England today.

There's Powell, with his Gibson Flying V tucked into the top of his right leg, handling the neck in a somewhat upright position. There's the checked trousers, and the occasional flat cap, and the romantic playing, the colour — the flash kept to a minimum.

Then there's Turner, harsher, more forceful, the big, heavy chord merchant — but never obscene, always graceful in his own deft way. The tidy player, more the rock and roller, but never an inch away from a unison with Powell. Turner has been playing for four years. He's 21, but looks younger.

"I started playing about the time of Cream. It was the first live thing I saw that I really got into. I got a guitar, and played on my own for about a year, then got a little band together in Birmingham, and did just about 20 gigs."

He did the audition for Martin and Steve, but didn't meet Powell until they were called back later. "I was dreading what guitar Andy would have, you know that sort of feeling. Andy had a home made version of a Les Paul, and I thought Christ, I'll kill him, because it really looked like one. But what a fake, it just worked."

"It was really strange, I knew within myself that something was there. You couldn't put your finger on it. We all freaked, the future had transpired."

And yet Ted was the gamble. He wasn't very competent, he hadn't been playing long. Martin had auditioned many better guitarists, but Turner had something about him. Although he was raw, it was openly obvious that one day he was going to be exceedingly good.

"I didn't know much more than the three chord" adds Ted, in a kind of shy way. "When I went for the first audition I never thought a thing about it. I had no idea that anything like this would transpire."

But Ted's a more assured person now, he can speak from his own platform. He's proved that potential. "I don't feel there's many people doing an awful lot with electric guitar these days. Not as much as can be done. There are an awful lot of guitarists, but few of them are great."

"Who would I pick as my favourite? Well, Andy Powell. No! I'm bloody serious. Obviously I never ignore people like Clapton, or Green."

"My big thing about the guitar though," says Ted, "is getting emotionally involved, rather than technically. Technique has to be learnt, sure, but I'll never take it too far. I value emotion far more."

Powell is also 21, but his influences are immediately different. For a start he's a Shadows freak. "Boy, I really got into them, I loved them. Everybody was only too willing to say it was pure commercialism, but they really did mean something to me. God, I'd buy their singles, and then rush home and copy them not for note. And Christ, the sound they got. I could never figure out how they did it."

He was born in Stepney, but then moved to Hemel Hempstead. He gigged with youth club bands, right until Wishbone. Like Turner, it was his first, and only professional band.

"I'd been a blueser for quite a while, but the Wishbone thing got me completely out of the rut. I had a feeling of great enthusiasm when I met Ted. It had to be great. I had a good job, I'd got the 'A' level bit and walked right into a junior executives' position. It was a big effort to get out of that, but I saw something."

"With Ted now it's got to the state where we are both establishing our own styles. There are things we'd both like to do to progress, but we prefer to do those things together."

"Ted isn't wasteful. He's very poetical, and incredibly emotional. I've got my emotion, but it's a rather nervous kind."

"I lean more towards the old school of guitarists, rather than the new breed. Django is the all time inspiration!"

Steve Upton

THEY say all drummers are mad, maybe because most of them appear intense. Steve Upton is no exception, his face often being lined with thought. A thinking person if ever there was one, yet his drumming career started as one big joke.

A technical college Christmas concert, and two guitarists were thinking of forming a band. They asked Upton if he knew a drummer, "yeh, I used to play a bit myself," said Upton, telling a tall tale.

But they believed him, and the next thing he knew they wanted him to play with them. "I told them I was joking, but it was no use. So I sat down with some Quality Street tins, and well, it just happened, that was it."

Upton, at 25, is the elder of the band. He's even got a "veteran" touch with his playing — cool, precise, but urgent, packing, there's little self-indulgence. A working drummer.

"It was just a hobby until I came to London. I started enjoying playing, and then moved up to Sheffield where I formed a band with a blues guy — we also played things like 'Glad All Over'."

They got to go to Germany, but the whole band bust-up, and Upton decided to go to Exeter. He gigged occasionally, and then met the Turner band, joined up with them, and found an excellent working relationship with Martin.

"I can't say I'm different in my approach to rock drumming than anyone else. I often think how much I mean to the band — you know could they do as well with anyone else? Could they do what I do?"

"One thing I know for myself is that I couldn't really see me working with anyone else. I couldn't even imagine it. In this unit we all feel the same way, it's not a group how most people think of groups — it's more than that."

Upton's trick is modesty. "My role is fulfilling my role to the best of my ability. I can only do my best, and I have no conscience about that aspect."

It's the beard that hides a confident smile. Like the rest of Wishbone he's amazingly confident, strong.

Martin Turner

THE first startling thing I noticed about the bass playing of Martin Turner was his glorious use of chorded work. His fingers were pulling off the most remarkable acts, and the tone, and load delivered was powerful, and filling—but never stodgy, never absurdly thick as to fall flat. An individual player.

He's the strongest person in the band. Well, that's how it appears. He's always the first to be the spokesman, the dark eyes looking steady, and levelled evenly and straight on the person he's talking to. Turner handles most vocals with a dry, but often frenzied edge. Turner and Upton are the backbone, the pushers.

"I'm not specifically a bassist with a group. Although obviously if it's got to be put on paper, then that's what I am. But all my playing comes from having a really broad

knowledge of music. Let's say I'm one of four musicians, who happens to be the bassist."

"To some extents I'm performing the role of a straight rock bassist, but because the music is changing so much leaves me with a feeling of not being hung up just because I'm playing that instrument."

"I don't practice. I don't sit for hours perfecting things. I'm much more concerned with the music of the band if you can understand that."

But if the music presents difficulty to him, adds Turner, then he's got to apply himself to it. "Exhibiting technical proficiency is not music as far as I'm concerned. Maybe I'm wrong, but I really feel that."

He played with other semi-pro musicians, and was in a band that became quite popular in Torquay. Working in the daytime, playing at night, that whole thing.

records

ALBUMS: "Wishbone Ash" (MCA, MKPS 2014). "Pilgrimage" (MCA, MDKS, 8004).

SINGLES: "Blind Eye" (MCA, MK 5061).

JUST two albums. That may not seem a lot of recording, compared to the output of most bands — but like the whole Wishbone story, they were planned albums. They were stage one, and stage two.

If we look back on the first collection, we are able to see Wishbone at the turning point. On several of the tracks they sound so more enterprising than a handful of other groups who appeared on album last year. But on tracks like "Blind Eye" — put out as a single, there's the obvious potential, that little bit of something that took it away from being just another heavy album.

Then recently we've had "Pilgrimage", a beautiful package, ten times as good as the first, and already chalking up incredible sales figures. If this, as the band say, is stage two, then stage three looks like being an exciting and promising time.

equipment

PA SYSTEM: Wem 300-watt P.A., 6 columns—2 horns.

ANDY POWELL (guitar):

Gibson flying V, Cry Baby Wah Wah, Orange 200-watt stack (4 x 4 x 12in. cabinet), Orange reverb unit.

TED TURNER (guitar): Gibson Les Paul Custom, Fender Strat, Sunburst, Orange 200-watt Stack (4 x 4 x 12in. cabinet), Orange reverb unit, Cry Baby Wah Wah.

MARTIN TURNER (bass): Rickenbacker Stereo bass, Orange 200-watt amp, 2 Orange reflector cabinets, Orange 2 x 15in. cabinet.

STEVE UPTON (drums): Ludwig (Champagne glitter), 22in. bass drum, 16in. x 13in. floor tom-tom, 14in. x 13in. snare (metal shell).

ACCESSORIES: Rogers bass drum pedal/HI Hat pedal. Cymbals: Avedis Zildjian, 20in. medium ride cymbal, 18in. crash ride cymbal, 18in. ride cymbal, 15in. HI Hat, 7in. splash cymbal.

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